

LESSONS FROM THE EARTHQUAKE.

The variety and extent of distress occasioned by the recent earthquake in Southern Italy, we are told, beggars description and baffles the imagination. We may well leave the revolting recital of desolation and anguish to others and address ourselves to learning the lessons that God would teach us.

A prominent philanthropist and Christian teacher construes the earthquake to be the punishment that God visits on men for their sins. A secular journal denies this and quotes our Savior's words, "Those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, nay." The editor's conclusion is that such events are mysteries and can not be explained upon a rational or Christian basis.

That such visitations come to particular individuals or communities because of their exceptional sinfulness can not be sustained as a principle of the divine government. It is true that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of the wickedness of the people. The flood came because of abounding wickedness, and Israel was terribly chastised and made desolate because of unbelief and disobedience, but the history of the world shows that God's most faithful people have suffered likewise from pestilence and wars of extermination, and merciless persecution, as well as from famine and convulsions of nature. And in all such providential visitations the innocent suffer with the guilty.

It is clear, however, that such events must be construed as a punishment of human guilt. If man were sinless he would not be a sufferer. If there were no sin in the world there would be no sorrow. The heavenly life is to have no tears. "There will be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall serve him."

The prophecies concerning the last times tell us of abounding iniquity and they also tell us that there shall be earthquakes in divers places. These two are associated and the one seems to be threatened as a consequence of the other. Not because of the sins of a particular community but because of a prevailing condition of ungodliness.

We cannot refer such an event simply to the blind forces of nature. Our God is a God of providence. He controls the winds and the waves of the sea. He settled the mountains on their foundations and turned the rivers in their courses. Earthquakes come by his permission and by his appointment. The fact that he foretells that they shall occur in the last days, evidences his appointment and control. They will occur because he has appointed their time.

A solemn lesson for us to learn is that the interests of the human family are largely identified. The sin of one class, or race, or generation brings penalties on many classes or on all. We cannot regard the worldliness or apostasy of any part of our race with indifference. The time of reckoning will come and it will be vast and comprehensive in its effects. Our failure to enlighten and purify any class or portion of humanity may involve penalties which the most enlightened and virtuous will have to bear. Our destinies are bound up in some degree with the destinies of the whole race.

One lesson that we may lay to heart in this age is,

that man can never become independent of God, or challenge the divine ownership and authority. Human resources are very vast and learning has advanced. The knowledge and appliance of scientific truth has made marvelous progress. The enginery of human achievement is massive and mighty. Man sometimes fancies he has passed beyond the stage of dependence on a mightier and wiser being. The rocking of the earth and the sweep of an angry sea reminds him that he is after all but a pigmy in the presence of Omnipotence. "He gathereth the waters of the sea together as an heap, he layeth up the depth in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him; for he spake and it was done, he commanded and it stood fast. The Lord bringeth the counsel of the heathen to naught; he maketh the devices of the people of none effect. The counsel of the Lord standeth forever and the thoughts of his heart to all generations. Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance."

WATCHMAN, WHAT OF THE NIGHT?

Are there signs of promise in the skies? Does the Kingdom come? How long our Lord has waited to see of the travail of his soul! Certainly we live far down the files of time, and many changes have taken place in the world. The nations are nearer together, and know each other better than they have ever done. The unity of the race is more than ever evident. All men are seeing that God hath made of one blood all men for to dwell on the face of the earth. There are no unknown peoples today. It has been said, "The last man has been found."

With this knowledge of the world and consciousness of unity, has come in the Church of Christ a world-consciousness, a sense of relationship to all men, and a deep, dominating conviction that each man is his brother's keeper. It is one of the signs of the times that throughout the great body of Christian believers there has been developed this strong sense of human unity and of responsibility.

However retired the place, however narrow the life, the Christian heart has taken on itself the burden of the world. Many, with the smallest means and in the lowliest service, are burdened and anxious with the wants of the world for which Christ died. In the village prayer meeting earnest, tearful petitions are offered for the nations that lie in darkness and the great multitudes that know not Christ. Out of the narrow means of the poor, with self-denial and trusting God for the morrow, many are giving for the spread of the Gospel and the saving of faraway and alien peoples.

Certain outstanding facts and events there are which are signs of God's mighty activity in extending his kingdom. We are passing through a period of missionary centennials, which are bringing to light the progress of God's kingdom. In Shanghai, in 1907, there was the Centenary Conference which commemorated the arrival of Morrison, the first missionary of the modern era in China. It was a marvellous story that was unfolded, touching the coming of Christ's kingdom to a vast nation of four hundred million souls. In 1910 there will be celebrated the centennial of the American Board.